

Circle Work

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Category: Blue Heelers

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-23 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-23 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:23:35

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,714

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Jack thought he was coping, when another tragedy strikes the Mt. Thomas community.

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> <meta name="Generator"> Dust flew as they drove along the gravel road that bordered the state forest

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By Jaye Reid.

Commenced: 14.12.1999

Completed. 31.01.2000

Disclaimer: Southern Star and the Seven Network own them. I have just borrowed their toys for a short while. I don't think I have done them any harm, actually I think they might be feeling a little better!

~*~*~*~

Dust flew as they drove along the gravel road that bordered the state forest. Small fallen branches, detached from the brittle limbs of the sugar gums that lined the road, cracked under the weight of the vehicle as it drove across them. The day had been bright, hot and sticky. The melting sun was starting to set, throwing an orange, reddish glow across the western sky. It was going to be another scorcher tomorrow.

There had been a report of vandalism. Some fences had supposedly been cut, letting stock out onto the road. More a case of bad maintenance in Jack's opinion.

Jack drove.

He liked driving out on the country roads. It was just like being at home.

"Do you think you could possibly slow down?" Jo quizzed.

She was a good driver, one of the best in her academy class. But the gravel and dirt roads in comparison to the hard smooth consistent bitumen were taking a bit longer to get used to.

"Nah, she's right," he replied with a grin. "I know what I am doing."

She was sure that he did.

But she still felt uneasy.

"Someone's been having some fun out here, chucking donuts," he remarked, indicating at all the tyre marks in the loose gravel.

"Don't know if you'd call it fun?" she replied cynically. "It won't be fun for them if **we** catch 'em."

"Yeah," he laughed, "that's what me and Craig used to say too."

She shot a look at him.

"You? You used to do donuts in the gravel?"

"Gravel, or out in the paddocks," he replied.

"Why?" she asked. Perhaps it was just a guy thing, but she really couldn't see the point.

"Ah, I don't know," he shrugged, " 'cause we could I suppose. It used to be great fun."

"It was?"

"Well I wouldn't do it now," he added.

"I should think not," she replied.

"Nah, I don't think the old Ute could handle it these days," he replied with a smile.

She looked out the window and shook her head without further comment.

Further along the road, Jo noticed that they didn't seem to be going as fast and she glanced over at the speedo.

"Yeah the road isn't as good along here. I'm okay really," he said seriously, noticing her observing his driving. "I told you I do know what I'm..."

"But they didn't!"

Jack looked to where Jo. was pointing.

She grabbed the radio.

"Mt. Thomas Station 208 to Mt. Thomas Station."

"Mt. Thomas Station go ahead 208," came Ben's voice - cool and crisp.

"Ben we have a code 12 approximately ahhh... 2 k from the Old Widgeree Highway on the Nine Mile Road."

There had been more circle tracks in the heavy gravel banked up in the middle and the sides of the road.

Jack braked.

Hard.

Tyres skidding in the gravel.

Dust flying.

One old Holden ute.

One old Holden ute, wrapped around a tree.

Jo could see the drivers side of the vehicle.

Well what was *left* of the drivers side of it.

"Mt. Thomas Station, this is Mt. Thomas 208 possible code 16 on the last, standby," she reported.

"Standing by 208," Ben replied.

She quickly hung the radio microphone back on its hook.

"Come on Jack," she said as she opened the door.

He hadn't moved.

"Jack?... Jack?"

He looked at her, a blank expression on his face.

"Urrghhhh," she sighed loudly. She could see that he wasn't going to be any use to her. She reached over and grabbed the portable radio from where it lay on the back seat before getting out of the car and heading over to the mess.

Aluminum foil.

That's what it reminded her of.

Twisted broken metal bent and folded around two trees.

Paint peeled away exposing hard, bare metal.

"What a mess," she muttered to herself.

She could just see the driver through what was left of the side

window. It and the windscreen were both smashed. A tree imbedded beside the front drivers side door almost blocked her sight.

But she could see enough.

The driver was slumped forward, his head twisted and leaning on the broken steering wheel.

The glassy wide-eyed stare told her that he was dead.

She realised that she **should** check for the non existent pulse just to clarify it. To be double sure.

Procedure.

Had to follow procedure.

If only for the paperwork that would have to be filed on this.

She carefully put her hand through the opening and checked.

Nope.

Nothing.

It was only after she did so that she realised half his head was caved in.

Long dead.

"Oh hell...."

She felt her lunch churning in her stomach. A foul bile taste started to make it's way to the back of her throat.

No, she told herself, focus.

Don't be sick, don't be sick, don't be sick.....

Breath, breath, that's it, she continued to tell herself as she stepped back from the wreck - breath.

She glanced over at the patrol car before flicking on the portable. Jack was still sitting in the car.

Unmoved.

"Mt. Thomas Station this is Mt. Thomas 208 on portable do you copy?"

"Go ahead Mt. Thomas 208," came the reply.

"Ahh we have a code 16 on the last Ben. Too late for the..."

She had been walking around the wreck. She noticed something else.

"Mt. Thomas 208, Jo. you still there?"

Silence.

"Mt. Thomas 208, Jo?"

But she could see someone else.

About 10 metres from the front of the ute, a body. Dead? She wouldn't have seen it if it wasn't for the red t-shirt. Hell, a woman?

Jo ran over and looked down at the crumpled body lying amongst the fallen tree limbs and scattered dry leaves.

She felt for a pulse.

There was a faint one.

"Mt. Thomas Station, we require an Ambulance and the Fireies at the scene. One deceased, one unconscious but alive."

"Roger 208 they are on their way."

Jo knew better than to try and move the woman. Girl really. She looked all of ... well not much younger than herself she thought, but definitely still a teenager. She glanced back at the vehicle. She noticed the red 'P' plate lying on the dash board. Stupid kids she thought.

Shock.

The girl would be in shock.

Best to keep her warm she thought. Even though the temperature was still hot from the day.

And Jack. What the hell was wrong with him?

She headed back to the patrol car. Actually she knew what would be wrong with him. This was the first accident since the bus crash. And although he thought he was okay, she now knew he wasn't.

To Jack crash equaled death.

And death equaled Molly.

Jo opened the driver's side door.

"Jack come on, we have one still alive," she said urgently.

He sat there just staring at the wreck. Her words were lost on him.

She pulled the lever beside his seat and opened the boot.

Inside the boot she found a tarp and rug of sorts. Grabbing them, she headed back to Jack.

"Come ON!" she said forcefully, grabbing his arm. "NOW Jack!"

He looked at her blankly. As if she was speaking in a foreign language that he just didn't understand.

"Now Jack," she repeated, her tone softer.

He nodded at her. Still with a blank expression, but at least it was some sort of sign that he was comprehending what she was saying.

Jo lead him past the crumpled wreck.

There was a stream of water leaking out from underneath where the front of the vehicle should have been. It was soaking into the soft dirt under the trees. Steam was rising from under the bonnet that was pushed almost back to the windscreen. They had hit the trees with great force and obvious speed. There was no water running through the radiator to cool the engine and it was overheating severely.

Jack glanced at the driver.

"What about...?"

The first words that he had spoken since they had come across the scene. She hated having to give him the answer.

"No. Too late for him," she replied. "But this one..."

They had reached the woman. She wanted to sound positive. Try and get him through this.

"She is still alive Jack," she said to him looking down at her.

Jo crouched down and check for her pulse again. Yes it was still there. She threw the rug over her and then folded the tarp over her as well.

"Got to keep her warm Jack," Jo said, "she'll be in shock. Stay with her, okay."

"Jo I can't..."

"Yes you CAN!" she interrupted.

She put her hand on his shoulder and pushed him down to the ground. He landed himself beside the girl.

Jo was surprised. His tall athletic frame; usually it would have taken some effort to put *him* on the ground. Many guys had tried and failed miserably on the football field.

But he had crumbled like a piece of wet paper.

He looked up at Jo.

"It's okay," she said to his sad eyes. "I'm just going to have a look around and make sure there is no-one else."

She walked off. Sticks cracking under her feet as she walked around.

Jack looked down at the young girl.

He pushed her hair from her eyes, off her face.

He wished he hadn't.

Now he could see her face.

Slashed and bleeding.

He should have expected this if he had been thinking straight. She had been thrown out of the vehicle. Thrown threw the windscreen. Perhaps it had smashed on impact, or perhaps she had been the one to break it as she catapulted through it.

"Where was your damn seatbelt?" he muttered to her. "You know you wouldn't be too bad if you had a seatbelt on."

He looked over at the ute. The passenger side where she would have been sitting was barely touched. If she had've....

Then he noticed the smoke...

The wreck.

Fire.

"Jo!" he yelled as he scrambled to his feet. "It's on fire... have to get... the driver!"

Jo caught up to him as he reached the tangled mess.

"Jack, I think he's too tangled in it. I don't think..."

"We've got to try," he replied wildly.

"Jack come on, if this goes up.... Jack it's too late for him."

Jack took no notice of her. The drivers side was impossible to attack. He opened the passenger side door with ease. He didn't seem to notice the condition of the driver in front of him. Jo. felt her stomach churn again at the sight.

She could see the young man's legs were wedged under the dashboard. There was no way they were going to get the body out. Not in a million years by themselves.

"Jack?" she almost pleaded. "Come on... this could go up."

"No!"

"Jack now come on, we can't do anything," she **was** pleading now. She grabbed his arm and pulled him away. He put up a fight, but not a serious one.

Jo dragged Jack back over to the girl lying on the ground. Jack looked down at her again. She looked so young lying crumpled on the ground. But her face was familiar. Maybe he had seen her around town? Down at the footy club?

Jo headed back towards the patrol car.

"I'm sorry," Jack started rambling to the girl. "I just couldn't.... I wanted to, but I just couldn't.... What were you doing out here anyway? If you are going to chuck donuts you have to pick a safer place. No trees... it's just too damn dangerous..."

He could see more smoke rise from the wreck and a flicker of flame.

"Ahhh no, I wanted to get her out," he continued. "I'm sorry, I wanted to... I tried but she was just stuck... there was no way... I should have got her out... tried harder. She was relying on me... she trusted me... I told her it would be okay..."

Jo was back standing with them by this stage. She stood there listening to Jack but knowing that he wasn't talking about *this* scene. The poor soul stuck in the mangled wreck was male, and Jack knew that.

Jack hadn't noticed Jo. standing there. He was lost in the thoughts going around in his head. He was back on that bus - Molly dying by his side.

"Perhaps if I had loved her still? If I didn't feel so betrayed? Maybe she wouldn't have died," he continued, his eyes welling up with tears. "If I could have just forgiven her, told her it didn't matter, but really meant it..."

Jo. again crouched down on the other side of the girl and checked her pulse again. And checked, and checked....

It wasn't there.

She was gone too.

Jo. looked at Jack, and then slowly pulled the tarp over her face.

Jack looked up at Jo., pain etched in his face.

And then his expression changed.

"She's dead?"

"Yes Jack."

He paused.

"I couldn't save her could I? It wasn't my fault?" he asked.

"No Jack, she probably had internal injuries after being thrown out," she replied.

Jack looked down at the covered body.

"No, I didn't mean her... I meant Molly," he replied. "It wasn't my fault that she died."

"No Jack it wasn't," replied Jo sadly, putting her hand on his shoulder. "The crash happened. You didn't know, no one could have known."

"Come on," he said getting to his feet, "we better get away from the wreck it is starting to go up."

They could hear the sirens of the fire truck approaching and that of the ambulance. They could see the dust flying as they approached and both officers walked back to the road to get out of the way.

The CFA members were swift in dousing the mangled vehicle with foam, it had barely started to burn. At least they would be able to make identification a lot easier with the driver. Jack walked over to speak to the ambo's as they climbed out of their vehicle. Jo. leaned back on the bonnet of the patrol car, watching him.

She knew that it wouldn't be the last time Jack was faced with this situation. It was just a part of the job, no matter how much they wished it wasn't.

But he had made it through.

And he would make it through again.

The End.

End
file.